Home Security and SHTF Defense:

How to Protect Your Home and Family

The purpose of this report is not to be 100% exhaustive in detailing everything that can be done to secure or defend your home. It is, on the other hand, designed to provide you with a solid foundation from which to start. And, in so doing, should cause thieves and criminals to seek easier targets both pre- and post-SHTF.

I should point out that I am no expert in these subjects. I am, however, awakened to the realities of life—that bad things really can happen—and am determined to protect my family first and possessions second. For these reasons, this report is a compilation of nearly everything I have learned regarding home security and SHTF defense.

The contents of this report are broken down into two major areas: home security and home defense. The home security segment describes mitigating actions you can—and should—take to reduce the chances (and opportunity) for theft or other criminal actions. The home defense segment describes response to threat actions, and is concerned with how you and your family will first avoid detection or confrontation and, if necessary, react to active engagements of force post-disaster.

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Home Security

To better secure your home and possessions you need to think like a thief. You may find this difficult (I know I do) because it takes a certain mindset to think this way. While there are exceptions, thieves are typically opportunists. They are interested in fast, easy targets. Make your home too difficult to breach and they will likely move on.

I do not want to imply that thieves are unsophisticated… far from it. In fact, thieves probably know your actions better than you do. You see, you're probably a highly predictable create of habit. Most of us are. And we're more similar in our human nature than we are different. Thieves use this to their advantage.

The point to remember is that criminals are opportunists, smarter than you might think, and unsympathetic to you. You're just an unsuspecting, easy mark. So, let's begin the journey, shall we?

It All Begins With Knowing Your Enemy

I would suggest it's hard to know what to do to better secure your home and family if you don't properly understand who you're dealing with.

Who are they?

As I stated earlier, thieves are opportunists and usually non-confrontational (but not always). You may be surprised to know that more and more thieves these days work in teams of two or more. Usually one thief will case a home while the other one drives the get-away car. (Even worse is when they use your vehicle as the get-away car!) They may even use your own tools to help them commit the crime. That has to be deflating to a homeowner.

Most burglaries occur during the daytime (between 2 and 5 p.m.) in the middle of the week while you and your family are at work and school. In fact, most burglaries are accomplished in just a few minutes. Moreover, burglaries are more likely to occur during the summer months. Last, burglaries tend to be perpetrated by young men (early twenties and younger).

What do they want?

They want easy to carry items that can be used for personal gain or sold quickly. This includes cash (to keep), jewelry, tools, small electronics, and guns for starters. Computers (especially laptops) are also a favorite but not necessarily because they can sell them; rather, criminals want your personal information (passwords, credit card details, and so on) for identity theft crimes. Prescription drugs are also a favorite. Anti-theft and fire safes may be stolen as well (if they can be easily grabbed or loaded into a car) as they may contain personal information such as birth certificates and, if they're lucky, expensive jewelry, coins, and so on. If you're going to have such safes—and you probably should—then purchase a good one and secure it adequately to your home!

What happens after I'm robbed?

The chances of reclaiming your belonging are fairly low and the odds of catching the burglar is even worse. There's a reason why burglaries are a popular crime: it's low risk with high rewards. Anyway, you'll probably be shocked you've been robbed, the police will take a report, and you'll file an insurance claim. Eventually, you'll get replacement items but it will take some time, cost you your insurance deductible, and you'll probably wind up arguing with your insurance company more than you thought.

By the way, you did remember to:

- Take a good inventory of your stuff with pictures and/or video?
- Keep multiple copies of your household inventory, one of which was stored off property?
- Keep your insurance policy up-to-date as well?
- Included appropriate insurance riders for your jewelry, cash, coins, guns, and everything else a "normal" insurance policy fails to cover?
- Understand precisely what and how your insurance covers your possessions?

After the fact is the wrong time to find out that what you thought was covered isn't. Be upfront and honest with your agent to get covered properly.

Your Actions (and Inactions) Are Critical

As I just stated a moment ago, you're a creature of habit… so am I. Sadly, many of those habits are not conducive to appropriate home security. The trick, therefore, is to adopt habits that foster positive home security practices. This is easier said than done, of course; especially where other family members are concerned.

So, the first place to start is with educating yourself then work toward educating your family members. I'm sure you'll agree that even the best door deadbolt will do little good if somebody fails to use it. As such, when you get everything in place… nag, nag, nag! (Until everyone "gets with the program" so-to-speak.)

Always lock your door deadbolts when leaving (even for short periods of time)

I’m constantly in shock at how many people I know that still don’t routinely lock their doors (let alone properly) when they leave. My in-laws were a prime example. With so many kids coming and going all of the time it was just easier to keep the doors unlocked. (They’re much better now but still not perfect.)

So, why should you care? For starters, it’s just a good habit to have. Moreover, thieves may be watching you from afar and know that they can gain quick access to your home when your deadbolt is not used. Do a YouTube search to see just how easy it is to bypass a basic handle knob lock—and do it quietly too!

Also, if you and your family have difficulty remembering to lock the door when you leave, then perhaps a keypad deadbolt for your front door is what you need. Such keypad locks can usually be set to automatically lock the deadbolt upon closing. All you have to do is to remember the code to get in.

Never hide a spare key ANYWHERE on your property, EVER!

Your best bet is to leave a key with a trusted neighbor (preferably) or a friend or family member instead. Thieves know to look for fake rock hide-a-keys as well as under your doormat or potted plant. Even if you think you’re being slick with your hiding spot there’s no need to take that chance.

Do not post your family name on your mailbox (or any other exterior location)

Thieves can call directory assistance to get your phone number then call your home while waiting outside to verify if you're home or not. You might as well post a sign

saying “I’m NOT home right now, please steal my stuff” each time you leave. There are other ways around this such as not having a home phone or by opting out of the directory listing. Regardless, now that I’m aware of this trick, I’m still amazed at how many homes I drive by that include a family name on their mailbox. Just don’t do it!

Do not leave a garage door opener in your vehicle if you park outside

As we are creatures of habit (and often lazy too) thieves know that homeowners like to keep their garage door openers in their vehicles—usually attached to the sunvisor—which makes for easy access to your home. At the very least, place your garage door opener out of plain sight and lock your doors at all times (and keep the windows rolled up while you’re at it).

The best option would be to either take the garage door opener with you inside or use the garage for its intended purpose and park your car(s) inside. Oh, and shut the garage door each time you park your car too. The same can be said for not leaving your car keys and other valuables inside your car, even when parked in your garage.

Keep all windows shut and locked (especially ground-floor windows)

Even though window glass is easy to break, thieves usually prefer a stealthy approach… and an open window is as inviting as grandma’s apple pie. This is particularly true for ground-floor windows, but second-floor windows should NOT be ignored either. We’ll discuss ways to mitigate second-floor access later.

Suffice it to say that windows should be shut and locked whenever possible, even when you are at home. Certainly, this is not 100% achievable all of the time; I

know there are reasons to open windows such as with regulating your home's temperature or to get some fresh air. You can, however, selectively choose which windows to open. For instance, you may opt to not open every window in the house at the same time. Rather, only open windows in rooms one-by-one and choose to spend some time in that room or very nearby.

Keep drapes and blinds closed while away from home

A quick peek inside your living room window or sliding glass door may tell a thief all he wants to know about your home. That is, if you're proudly displaying the latest and greatest 80" plasma television on your wall in plain view of an open window then you may be asking for trouble. Keep thieves guessing simply by drawing all drapes and blinds closed while you are away.

Valuables should be stored away when not in use

There's not reason to make things easier for the thief if they break in. Valuables such as guns, jewelry, watches, coins, and even cash should be stored away in a secure location when not being worn or in use. Use a quality gun safe to store your guns when not in use and an anti-theft safe to store jewelry, cash, and so on. Remember, seasoned thieves have seen it all. Don't think you're being slick just because you stashed your cash under the drawer… they'll probably look there.

Do not open your door to strangers

This one should be obvious but people do it all of the time (including me). I've trained my children well not do this but I still have work to do.

Teach good practices to your family (especially children)

Take your security seriously. Check your door and window locks nightly and involve the children in your home security activities. The more you and your family work at these practices the more likely they will become second nature.

Exterior Doors are NOT as Secure as They Should Be

Like windows, all exterior doors should be treated with extra attention because these are the only pathways into and out-of our homes. As such, they are obvious ambush locations for criminals and thieves. This is especially true of front doors but all other doors (including the garage door entryway) should be considered.

Ensure your front door has a wide-angle peephole (and always use it BEFORE opening your door)

Even if you already have a peephole in your door, purchase and install a wide angle peephole (the wider the better) so that you have the best view of who is at your door. You are using your peephole BEFORE opening your door, aren't you? Criminals know that typical peepholes have blind-spots along the sides, so they will ring your doorbell and then hide out of view. Then, when you open your door they rush in. The best way to combat this is to NEVER open you door unless you're sure who is standing on the other side. Also, before purchasing a replacement peephole you should know what diameter the hole in the door is or be willing to enlarge the hole if you purchase a wider diameter lens. At roughly between $10-25 it could be one of the best investments you've ever made.

Include a heavy-duty door chain/bar/club on front door (and use it!)

One of the more popular attacks criminals use (those who may be interested in more than just robbing from you) is the "rush" attach alluded to previously. Such

attacks are meant to catch you off-guard and are deceptively simple. Ring the doorbell and as soon as somebody answers "rush" the door and cause immediate havoc and chaos. This is the most frightening scenario I can think of.

A simple, yet somewhat effective, repellent to this type of attack is a heavy-duty door guard, which is used to delay such attacks when you answer the door. A door guard is significantly better than a door chain at repelling these attacks, so I would recommend these instead. Unfortunately, such security devices have been known to fail in some situations. This is in large part due to the momentum that can be gained from the few inches of play between a closed door before being stopped by the door chain/bar. Rather, the real purpose is to give you a few seconds to flee or arm yourself properly. I don't want you to think that such security measures are useless, not at all. Compared to nothing, which is already conveniently installed on your front door, they are a definite step-up.

For added nighttime protection (when everyone is home) I would suggest either a basic door security bar that wedges between the door knob and floor or a "katy bar" style device to better brace the door from kick-ins. Another idea that I haven't tried but hear good things about is the door club. This is something that installs directly into the floor for greater resistance to rush attacks. I'm not sure that the door club will work with tiled floors but should be ok with all wood and carpeted flooring for sure.

Regardless of what you choose, ensure it is heavy-duty and installed securely. Equally important is that you MUST use it. Get into the habit of locking your deadbolt and latching the door guard anytime someone is home and ALWAYS open the door with it engaged whenever you answer the door to somebody who

you don't know, even the delivery man (unless, perhaps, you were expecting a delivery that day). By the way, there's no to open the door to answer it; shouting works well enough in most instances.

Install heavy-duty strike plates and long-throw deadbolts

Criminals know that doors are inherently weak along the edges. One specific spot that we like to think is secure—but really isn't—is the door's deadbolt. Sadly, door deadbolts do not reach long enough to properly secure the door at the deadbolt to a wall stud. In fact, the only part of the doorframe that the deadbolt contacts is the strike plate—which is a weakness in and of itself—that came with the deadbolt. To make matters worse, the screws that secure the strike plate to the doorframe do not make contact with the wall stud either! A well-placed kick and the whole assembly may well cave in.

There are a few things you can do here. At the very least you can replace the screws that secure your strike plate to the doorframe. I would suggest replacing all of the current screws with three inch wood screws (framing screws are best) for better retention to the wall stud. Do this with the knob lock side too (into the door). A better alternative would be to replace your current strike plate with a heavy duty security strike; such strike plates are a serious piece of metal as compared to traditional strike plates. Replacing your strike plates as well as the screws that anchor it is probably the best action you can take if money is tight.

A really cool deadbolt, The Ultimate Lock 3000 series, takes deadbolt security to the max. However, assuming cost is a concern then I would install a heavy duty security strike plate, which should include screws that will contact the wall stud on all exterior doors (as well as the garage entry door) and call this part done.

Replace all exterior door hinge screws (to both sides of hinges)

Remember not to neglect the hinge side of your doors either. The screws that secure the door hinges to both the door and the doorframe are tiny at best. These should be replaced with three inch wood screws to properly penetrate the wall stud, just as you would with the door strike plate. Do this for all exterior doors (and garage entry door). If cost is a concern, then replacing at least one screw on each side of the hinge is the bare minimum suggestion.

Exterior doors should be solid wood or metal (if possible)

Your exterior doors should be as sturdy as possible and preferably not include window panes that allow easy access to door knobs and locks. (It seems to me that doors are becoming more and more like windows than doors.) Replacing exterior doors is an expensive project, so I would only recommend this for those who expect to stay at their location for some time to come or for those who have woefully inadequate exterior doors to being with. Also, if you can spare the expense, including a metal frame (such as EZ Armor) for the door would increase the effectiveness of any metal door you install.

Sliding glass doors should be barred from opening (and from being lifted)

Whoever invented the sliding glass door was a moron. Not only are sliding glass doors probably the largest nearly indefensible spot in a home (because of the large glass surface area), they are notorious for being easily accessible by thieves. While there are different options to better secure your sliding glass door from being opened, I prefer a combination approach.

First, start with a highly visible sliding door bar, also known as "charley bars". The purpose here is twofold: (1) help to prevent the door from being slid opened and (2) alert the bad guys that you mean business about your home security. Even a broom stick in the track is better than nothing. Second, I would include a through-the-door-pin to help prevent the door from physically being lifted off its tracks, although many newer sliding doors can be better adjusted to prevent this problem.

Double doors ("French" doors) should include secondary locking devices

Double doors, like sliding doors, are serious weak points in most homes. Most double doors use a simple half-barrel slide bolt to secure the stationary door to the doorframe. Unfortunately, these cannot be relied upon. Use flush bolts instead. You should also apply all previous advice regarding the hinges and strike plates.

Remove the knob (end-stop) on your garage door pull release handle

Here is another one I had no idea about until I watched a YouTube video some time ago. Thieves can use this to gain access to your garage from the outside when closed. They can do so by using something like a coat hanger to shimmy between the top of the garage door opening and the garage door itself where they can then hook the pull release knob thereby disconnecting the garage door from the track. Removing the knob at the end of the rope solves this problem yet still allows you to pull the cord to open the garage door manually.

Replace flimsy screen doors

The basic screen doors used to keep bugs out are no security whatsoever. Replace them with a metal or wrought iron security door for more protection and be sure to engage the lock whenever you lock the door deadbolt too.

Windows are Easy Targets

Windows are not only a requirement in modern homes but a welcoming attraction to most people as well. Unfortunately, they're also attractive to thieves but for different reasons. Unlike doors, windows have latches—not locks—that are usually easy to bypass and, if all else fails, the glass is easy to break. Even worse (with respect to home security anyway) is that windows are taking over modern home construction, they're just… everywhere. Arghhhh! So, what to do about it?

Install window locks/bars (especially for windows with room a/c units)

There are a variety of window security locks available, some better than others. Take a trip to your local hardware store or do an online search and you'll see what I mean. The problem is that I have yet to find one that is everything I wanted in a window lock. They are either relatively flimsy (thus, not likely to withstand a determined burglar) or too secure (such as with a keyed window lock) which would hinder other aspects of preparedness such as fire safety.

What should you do? Use them anyway! They're better than nothing and, at the very least, let thieves know you mean business. Of course, you could just go all-in and install burglar bars on all your windows, but that is a costly option and probably frowned upon in most neighborhoods. Another thought is to use a simple wooden dowel or piece of wood cut-to-fit to prevent windows from opening. Perhaps a through-the-door-pin, as discussed earlier, will work as well.

One last area of consideration is windows with anything that are set in them such as window air conditioning units or window fans. You really need to bar these windows because thieves know that people are lazy and are not likely to use locks with window a/c units (even for second-floor windows).

Consider window and door opening/breakage alarms

Another window (and door) security option is window/door security alarms. These are simple devices that emit a loud sound when two points of contact are separated. Although quickly defeated by a thief upon entry, the loud noise may be enough to deter them any further as well as to alert you to a problem. These can be purchased many places, including Walmart and local hardware stores.

Another alternative is a window glass breakage alarm. This type of device also emits a loud sound but only if the glass has been broken. These are more expensive alarms and are probably not necessary in most cases.

If you do choose to use any of these alarms be sure to install them where they cannot be easily accessed upon cracking the window. For instance, if your window opens vertically (up and down), then install the alarm near the top of the moving window and not near the window sill. Also, I would only consider such alarms for use in little-used locations such as guest bedrooms, basements, and so on.

Consider window tint and/or laminate on ground floor windows

Although window laminate is more of a home defense topic, window tint could prove to be a useful deterrent to most thieves. Although probably not practical for larger windows and sliding glass doors, window tint may be just the thing in order to limit prying eyeballs into smaller openings such as bedroom windows or basement windows. Some tints are nearly impossible to see through even with flashlights. Check your local hardware store for options.

Fragment retention film (I call them laminates even though they are apparently not) go by a variety of names, including safety film, security film, mylar film, and

anti-terrorist film, among other names. This product, created by 3M, comes in thicknesses of between two and fourteen mils thick and is meant to reinforce glass windows to protect occupants from shattered glass. Such laminates could become very useful for home defense in a post-disaster scenario as well as for general home security.

Ensure Your Home is Not Inviting to Intruders

Thieves and criminals use your home's exterior to provide clues as to how easy a target your home and family might be. And, in some cases, they even use your home's exterior to their advantage in the process! Turn the tables and give the edge to the home team, as it should be.

Do not allow your home's landscaping and layout to be an invitation

- **Trees and shrubs should be trimmed** properly in order to reduce hiding spaces (especially near doors and windows). The hiding spaces aren't just from you but from nearby neighbor's as well as from cars passing by.
- **Install motion-sensing security lights** around dark areas of the home's exterior and especially the driveway and front door. (Actually, most exterior motion-sensing lights are actually heat-sensing, not movement-sensing.) The more of your home that can be lit up the better. Thieves prefer to not be seen. Motion sensing security lights make it harder for thieves to hide and easier to be identified, if necessary. I can't recommend them enough. Also realize that the driveway and main entryway are critical spots to illuminate in order for you to recognize threats as you arrive home; ensure your best lighting is here. Also, do not leave exterior lights tuned on permanently as thieves may identify this as a sign that you are not home or on vacation.

- **Be aware of items that thieves can use to access a second level window or door**. This could include ladders, patio furniture, a tree, fence, balcony, etc. Where feasible, make it as difficult as possible for thieves to access a second floor window or door. Walk around your home's exterior and look for anything they can use for such purposes and take any actions to remedy the problem as you see fit.
- **Consider adding a fence around the perimeter of your home**. A fence is a psychological barrier than may deter intruders.

Use timers to turn on lights/tv/radio even while away from your home

A dark home at night definitely screams "ROB ME!" to even the dumbest of criminals. Even if you are customarily home at night, it may be well worth the investment to purchase a few simple lamp timers to turn on lights (and if you're so inclined, a radio or television) in order to simulate the home being occupied; an added benefit would be having your home lit up when you come home.

Anyway, lamp times are best used everyday and with the blinds or curtains drawn so that exceptionally nosy thieves must remain suspicious. Stagger the timers such that lights are turned on to mimic normal home use. For example, lights in family rooms and kitchens should be on earlier in the evening while lights in bedrooms would come on later at night with staggered on and off times.

Install a home security system AND use it (ensures help is on the way)

While security alarms are certainly recommended, do not believe for one minute that your home is therefore immune to theft. Brazen thieves have been known to rob a house while the alarm siren is blaring in broad daylight because they know full-well that (1) they can get in and out before police arrive, and (2) many police

departments are not responding as fast as they did in the past due to reasons such as accidental alarm trips and even budgetary cutbacks. Heck, they may even kick the front door in and wait for an hour to see if anyone responds.

Perhaps the best reason to have an alarm system is to display the security system sticker prominently on exterior windows or doors (especially at the front and rear of the house). Even fake alarm stickers or a few “beware of dog” decals and signs are deterrents… even if ultimately untrue.

An important and usually missed aspect of including an alarm system in your home security measures is this question: what is your family’s response if/when the alarm system is triggered? Do you just sit there and stare at each other? Do adults go for guns? Do children hide? Do you go to a safe room, an upstairs bedroom, or basement? Do you immediately grab a phone and begin dialing 9-1-1? Talk about it and have a plan in place!

If you do choose to include an alarm in your home security measures then ensure it has a battery backup, a very loud horn (that can be programmed to turn off after a few minutes to avoid seriously annoying your neighbors), and fire-sensing capability. Alert nearby neighbors of your alarm system so they are more likely to respond if a problem occurs while you are away.

Last, an alarm system does not need to be fancy, expensive, or even monitored. DIY alarm systems are available at reasonable prices. In fact, some systems can even be programmed to call or text you if it has been tripped.

Other Ideas and Solutions

Following are a few other thoughts that just didn't seem to fit anywhere else.

Get a large dog (or two)

Dogs are man's best friend for a reason. In fact, a dog may be the best security investment you'll ever make. Dogs are a natural early warning system. They don't stop working when the power goes out and there is no waiting for a dog to show up to respond to intruders.

More importantly, criminals tend to avoid homes that have large barking dogs. (FYI, there are also barking dog alarms available if actual dogs are not an option.) In fact, some breeds are fierce defenders of their "pack" and property. Consider these traits when purchasing a dog. And, with proper training, a dog can be a serious weapon in your arsenal. This isn't to say that criminals won't stoop to poisoning dogs or even shooting them, but they are a helpful line of defense.

Use an operation identification program (or something similar) to track valuables if stolen

This program is meant to allow your stolen goods to be tracked by law enforcement should the need arise. This is best done by inscribing your driver's license number (not your social security number) on more expensive (and likely pawned) equipment such as your television, stereo, computers, and other small electronics so that police can identify and locate you if your items are retrieved.

Buy a heavy-duty anti-theft safe (should be rated B3 or better)

Thieves have become very good at breaking into a simple fire safe and even some basic anti-theft safes. If you're going to put the money toward a safe then ensure it

is a good one. I would recommend against a keypad safe for other reasons such as EMP considerations), but they are getting more difficult to find, so even a good keypad safe is better than no safe.

Regardless of how good your safe is at resisting forced entry, if the thief can physically move the safe then they have all the time in the world to open it. As a consequence, your safe should be secured to your home's structure (such as to the subfloor) to deny such an attempt.

I would also suggest that your safe NOT be located in your bedroom or master closet since a safe is expected to be there. As an alternative, consider a small diversion fire safe located in your master closet with a few small goodies to throw them off while your main safe is discretely located somewhere else.

Get to know your nearby neighbors

Doing so establishes trust and a network of people who can help you (and vice-versa) if needed. These are the people who will be the most suspicious of anything out of the ordinary with your home such as your home's security alarm or people they do not recognize snooping around at unexpected times. This might be a great opportunity to start a neighborhood watch program. Whatever you do, get to know your neighbors!

Safe Rooms

Such rooms are both good and bad. They can be quite elaborate or minimalist and even hidden. Some people go to extraordinary lengths and expense to build them. With respect to a home security situation, a safe room is just a place where you and

your family can retreat to in the event of a home invasion. It should be constructed well enough to repel forced entry for at least a few minutes while help arrives.

Improvised safe rooms are constructed in master bedroom closets but any location that works for you is ok so long as all family members know how to properly bar the room from entry as well as what to do after doing so (call the police, arm themselves, etc). Bedrooms, in particular, are also a good choice—and probably a better one than a closet—because then you at least have a potential escape route through a window.

The problem with traditional safe room ideas is that, after entry, you're essentially a trapped rat. There is no way escape and the bad guy knows it. If they're up to no good (and they probably are if they're brazen enough to attempt a home invasion) then they could simply decide to do something like start a fast-spreading fire. This will either force you out where they can attack you or the fire will kill you if you choose to stay. As such, a bedroom with a window is probably the best option.

How to build a safe room

To begin, start with swapping out the worthless hollow-core door with a solid metal door and use all of the techniques discussed previously to properly secure your door. The same can be said for the doorframe as well.

Your safe room windows, especially, should include some form of shatter resistance such as window laminate, burglar bars, or something that would deter or prevent an outside intruder from gaining access; this advice is especially true for ground-floor bedrooms that you wish to turn into a safe room. I would also ensure your safe room windows are covered with heavy curtains/blinds or, at least, very

dark window tint so that an intruder cannot see what you're doing inside. At the same time you won't see him so you're more likely to remain calm and react aptly.

As for the walls or anything else, there's little need to attempt to reinforce them due to the cost associated with such an undertaking. Strangely, I would think it easier to break through two layers of drywall than a well-barred door. Fortunately, you can use this to your advantage because the bad guy doesn't realize that fact!

One last thought: If your bedroom safe room is on the second floor then I would strongly encourage you to purchase a fire escape ladder. This ladder can not only be used to escape through a window in the event of a fire but also to escape if it is apparent an intruder is going to breach the room and help has not yet arrived.

What to do upon entering

Remember that the point of a safe room is to provide a sanctuary where you can wait for help to arrive. As such, you MUST have the means to communicate with 9-1-1 in this room at all times! A landline phone may be ok but I wouldn't rely upon it as your sole means of communication.

At the very least, I would include a cell phone that is fully charged, plugged into the wall at all times, and activated if it's a prepaid phone (although all cell phones should be able to dial 9-1-1 even if not activated). Prepaid phones are a great idea for this situation because they shouldn't cost you a monthly fee but still work for their intended function. Regardless, check with the prepaid phone's service provider before assuming you won't be charged a monthly fee after activation.

Whatever you choose, ensure all family members understand that calling 9-1-1 is their first action—after barring the door, of course—upon entering the safe room. Their second action should be arming themselves. As such, I would also encourage you to have some means of self-defense always readily available in this room. It could be a lethal option (or even non-lethal) but ensure every capable family member knows where the self-defense weapons is and how to use it. Of course, all of the appropriate safety precautions should be taken with respect to firearms and young children if they are your choose self-defense weapon.

Beware the Holiday Season

The holidays are a time for thieves to cash-in on your hard work. You see, criminals know people have purchased new goodies and they want a bit of the action. They also recognize that many families are out-of-town visiting friends and relatives, so many homes are easy-pickings. Here are a few ideas when you're out of town as well as a few general concerns:

- **Ensure your mail and newspapers are picked up daily**. This is where being a friendly neighbor pays off. You should also alert your neighbors if you expect any deliveries while you are away. The last thing you want to do it to advertise you're obviously away.
- **Put a stop to your mail** while you're out of town. Simply fill out a form at the local Post Office. Thieves know to check for overstuffed mailboxes.
- **If you will be gone for more than a week**, ask a neighbor to perform basic chores, including setting out your garbage cans and recycle bins, cut the grass, water plants, feed pets, and generally check on your home. Consider paying a neighbor kid to do these chores for a small fee.
- **Remember to use lamp timers, draw curtains, and lock up securely** as a basic rule and especially while you're away for days or weeks on end.

- **Keep your whereabouts off the social networks**. The same can be said for both home and cell phone voicemail messages too. This advice holds true anytime you're away on vacation. Who knows how they might gain access to this information but it's better to be vigilant with your security.
- **Keep your drapes and blinds drawn shut during the holidays** in order to hide such sights as a Christmas tree with tons of presents underneath. A snooping thief may decide your house is a good target for just this reason.
- **Avoid placing all of the empty boxes for your new electronics in plain view** for a thief to take note of all of the new goodies for them to steal. Consider making a special trip to a local recycling center to dispose of these boxes, put them out little-by-little, or even turning the boxes inside out is better than nothing.
- **Do not run Christmas lights to be hanged outside through open windows**… you're just asking for trouble from criminals as well as a potential fire hazard. Install an exterior outlet instead.

Miscellaneous Concerns

- If you recently moved into a home, **replace all exterior door locks** (or have them re-keyed at much less expense) to ensure no unauthorized persons have easy access to your home. If the garage door is electric then you should also change the code to your keypad and openers.
- If you garage door is not used on a regular basis, consider **locking it from the inside** with a padlock or similar locking device.
- **Never leave your house keys** with any unsupervised individual or business (such as a lot attendant or vehicle mechanic) because the keys could be copied. Give them just the keys needed to operate your vehicle instead.

- Planting **thorny bushes** next to windows can discourage criminals from using them to hide.
- Periodically **check your garage door's adjustment** to ensure that it cannot be lifted up enough so that a small person might crawl underneath.
- **Ensure there is no easy access to your garage**. Many tools and equipment (such as ladders) can be found here to gain primary access to your home.
- Basement windows are a common source of entry. Ensure **additional attention is given to basement windows** with appropriate locks, burglar bars, or even replaced with a polycarbonate (Lexan) material if the window is small enough. Realize that Plexiglas and polycarbonate are not the same materials; Plexiglas cannot be substituted for security glass.
- If you're having work done inside your home **watch the repairman while he or she works**. Not only does this help to avoid misunderstandings regarding their repair work, but hinders their ability to steal your possessions and, most importantly, ensures they did not unlock a window or door for a later break-in. Of course, honest repairmen would never do such a thing, but it's better to be safe than sorry.

Home Defense

Sometimes I sit and ponder exactly what I would do if I had to “lock down” my home after a disaster in order to (1) avoid detection by, or interest from, criminals and (2) adequately defend my home, family, and possessions if need be.

To be honest, this is a very difficult task to accomplish—and most likely an impossible undertaking—in a suburban neighborhood. For starters, some defensive modifications will make your home stick out like a sore thumb. More critically, suburban homes were never designed to be defensible… far from it.

You should also be very realistic about from whom you are defending as well as precisely what are you defending.

The first question, from whom are you defending, can mean many things. For example, are you talking about defending from a gang of criminals, a small military unit—just give up if this is the case—or your next door neighbor that failed to plan at all? How many people can you expect to defend against? Defending against ten well-armed and highly trained people is far different than defending against two desperate thugs with rocks and clubs. Be realistic and definitive in your answers so you can not only define what a winning battle looks like but a losing one too.

The second question, what are you defending, also needs a concrete answer. In other words, what is your defensive perimeter? Is it just your home or your entire yard? Or, perhaps you intend to defend a much larger perimeter such as the entire neighborhood? Consider a layered approach to your defensible perimeters. And,

what happens when a perimeter is breached? Do you have fallback plans and evacuation routes planned? While there are many other potential questions that can be asked about your home defensive plans, these should give you something to think about it.

Last, don't believe that you can magically transform your home into a fortress overnight. Not only is this unrealistic, it is costly, time-consuming, and most critical—the supplies you would need to do so won't be available post-disaster.

OPSEC is Where to Start

Unfortunately, the very fact that you're prepared will also likely be the cause of a future confrontation between you and the bad guys. What do I mean? I'm talking about everything you've stockpiled and will use on a regular basis to live post-disaster. This could include anything from lighting (such as flashlights, candles, and campfires) to your BBQ grill for cooking meals. Even everyday noise by children, dogs, or from chopping wood could give your location away.

So, the first aspect of home defense that MUST be addresses immediately is your operational security (OPSEC). In particular, you need to enact light and noise discipline at all times. For instance, the light of a single cigarette may be discerned from a mile away, while a candle may be seen from miles away. Likewise, sound travels a great distance, especially when the rest of the suburban world is as quiet as a mouse. Smells (from cooking, wood-burning fireplaces, bathroom activities, etc) are also a concern that must be addressed.

What should you do about these concerns? Awareness is key. Make certain everyone understands the problems and work together to minimize them.

First, consider light discipline

You must have the ability to block all light from exiting your residence post-disaster. This could include boarding up windows to erecting blackout curtains or permanently taping newspaper or cardboard over the windows. Whatever you choose to do, check to be sure it works each and every night! Assign someone to walk around the perimeter of your home to check for light leaks. All leaks should be remedied immediately. In addition, consider limiting all forms of light at night to an as-needed basis. (There was a time when we actually went to bed when the sun went down.) Or, at the very least, designate a specific room as the only lighted room and all others must remain dark.

Also, the light from campfires can be seen a great distance away. If you're going to use campfires for cooking or warmth, use them during the day to limit being seen and consider ways to block them from view. Such ideas include only using a campfire in a fenced backyard, erecting small walls around the campfire as well as the knowledge of how to create a fire that is difficult to be seen. In addition, the smoke from a campfire would be another concern during the daytime, but is less of a problem at night.

Second, consider noise discipline

There's a reason why hikers carry a quality pealess whistle on them in the event they become lost. Sounds travel a long distance, especially when nothing else is making any noise. In fact, noise may actually be more difficult to control than light is. Children and dogs are particular sources of distress as they are known for making noise unexpectedly and at the most inopportune of times. Sadly, you may need to muzzle your dogs at times. Training them to be quiet beforehand is a better option. Children can be reasoned with some, depending on their age and

temperament, of course. There are plenty of other reasons and activities that create "too much" noise, some that can be avoided or minimized, while others cannot be. In this case, consider how you might accomplish noisy tasks as fast as possible.

Third, consider odor discipline

Human habits also tend to produce distinctive smells. Cooking, heating, and waste disposal are the major concerns. For instance, be sure to bury fecal waste properly, not only for sanitary reasons, but for OPSEC considerations as well. Substances such as lime, wood ash, sawdust, cat litter, and even good old dirt can be used to control odors until buried.

Minimizing odors when cooking or heating via fire is a bit more difficult because burning wood has a distinctive smell. Consider alternative methods to cook your food as much as possible. Even consider cooking multiple meals at one time (one for lunch and another for dinner) if cooking over a campfire and then extinguishing that fire to limit detection. For heating, consider propane or kerosene heaters instead of burning wood.

The only caveat I would have is that cooking inside of your home (or any enclosed structure) in order to avoid detection is a horrible idea because of carbon monoxide poisoning and/or asphyxiation due to a lack of oxygen. Use common sense and always consider your immediate safety before OPSEC.

Enlist Others to Help ASAP!

For a long time I've had a problem with family and friends who choose not to prepare themselves and their families. I fully expect these people to show up at my doorstep TEOTWAWKI+1 with their hands out and mouths open. As much as it

bothers me, my stance on their subject has softened in recent years, particularly because it is highly likely that I will NEED these people to help secure my family and home post-disaster.

As much as I like to think I can do everything myself, that just isn't true. In reality, I can't think of any aspect of preparedness besides home defense where this is more assured. The fact is that you cannot cover every part of your home or even deal with multiple threats at once. YOU NEED HELP! Consider taking in at least one additional family (if not two) who can share in the daily responsibilities and who are willing and able to help defend your families and home.

Whom should you include? That's entirely up to you. Extended family is an obvious first thought, however, they may be the worst option as they may feel entitled to your supplies but later unwilling to share in the work and, even worse, difficult to evict should this state of affairs occur. Maybe likeminded neighbors are a better option.

Whoever you choose, select them well before a disaster occurs and layout their expectations, duties, and consequences for not following through. Talk to them about what they should bring with them (e.g., food, clothing, weapons, etc), the sleeping arrangements, as well as who will be in charge… that's you, by the way.

Hardening Your Home

As I alluded to earlier, your home was never intended to be a defensible structure. What you've learned from the home security segment should tell you that. The story gets even worse when we discuss how to keep people out who REALLY want in. Everyday thieves are one thing; outright criminals in an SHTF situation

are another. You should also clearly understand that the purpose of these ideas is NOT to keep people out indefinitely; they are, however, intended to keep them out long enough for you to properly respond to the threat. Without getting crazy, here are some additional actions you can take.

Exterior doors revisited

Assuming you followed a majority of the ideas outlined in the home security segment for your doors then you're in better shape than most homeowners. However, there are a few additional steps you can take to address specific vulnerabilities that most doors still encounter.

These days many doors have decorative inset windows or sidelites (windows along the side of the door) both of which are easy breach points. To shore up these areas I would suggest you purchase a few sheets of ¾" OSB plywood from your local hardware store that can be cut to fit your door's inset windows and sidelites. This type of plywood offers a significant amount of tensile strength and is relatively difficult to burn too.

If/when SHTF, cut these sheets of plywood—precut and labeled sheets are best—to fit well over the glass opening and screw into place (into the wall studs for sidelites) with 3" wood screws and appropriate fender washers (to prevent the screws from being easily punched through the plywood). Although not my preference, I would also stock a box of sturdy framing nails to use in place of screws in the event you cannot use your power drill due to a lack of electricity.

Another idea to provide additional protection is to bar your doors with a "katy bar". A katy bar is simply a sturdy bar that spans your door horizontally and

attached to the wall studs on either side of the doorway. Think back to medieval movies where you saw people lifting large pieces of wood before opening doors and you'll get the idea. Anyway, you can purchase one or build your own.

Here are a few suggestions to improve your katy bar build should you choose to make yours:

- **Remove the inside door frame casing/molding** so that the katy bar can fit flush to the door AND wall. Any play between the katy bar and door is NOT what you want because it allows for momentum to more easily break the katy bar down.
- **Double-up 2x4's** (thicker wood is better such as doubled up 2x10's or even a single 4x4) to offer more resistance.
- **Place the katy bar just above the door deadbolt** in order to reinforce it (or, if you can afford to, create two katy bars for each door and place them 1/3 of the way from the top and bottom of the door to create three points of resistance – two katy bars and one deadbolt).
- In order to allow the door to be opened from the inside, **build a set of L-shaped braces that attached to the wall studs** on either side of the door and allow the katy bar to slide down into place (the other option is to ignore the braces and just secure the katy bar directly to the studs, but this will NOT allow the door to be opened at all, which is a major fire hazard and causes a huge bug out dilemma, so I wouldn't recommend this at all).

Windows revisited too

As for your windows, if you didn't purchase fragment retention film or burglar bars—and even if you did—then I would consider a similar approach to your windows as you did with your doors. Purchase, precut, and install ¾" OSB

plywood over your windows using the same technique as for your doors. You can even brace most windows with a katy bar, except that I would just screw it directly into the wall studs because there should be no reason to open most windows.

Garage doors are weak

Garage doors were briefly mentioned with regards to home security. Sadly, they'll get little more here because of the simple fact that most garage doors are easily breached regardless of what you try to do. I would suggest you prepare for this fact and choose to bar the garage door entryway to your home in a similar fashion as all other exterior doors.

At the very least, you should lock down your garage doors from the inside. If your garage door includes slide bolts that insert through the rails, use them; if not, then you'll have to improvise.

One option is to drill holes in the rails into which you can insert something like a carriage bolt (or maybe a padlock) to stop the garage door from being lifted open. If drilling holes into your garage door rails makes you uncomfortable then you'll want to come up with something else such as a 2x10 that can be mounted horizontally directly above the garage door to prevent it from rolling opening. I assume you could also use a combination of plywood and 2x4's to reinforce the garage doors too, just like your doors and windows.

Another idea would be to park a car inside the garage that is butted up against the garage door as a backstop (and chocked to keep from rolling) as well as a car directly outside in the driveway placed perpendicular to the garage door as an initial barrier; remove the wheels, flatten tire, or place it on blocks to help keep the

vehicles from being easily rolled out of the way. Anything that you can do to thwart a vehicle from ramming directly into your garage door and allowing entry by foot is recommended. Whatever you choose to do, the idea is to put as much mass as possible between you and outside projectiles.

Walls are vulnerable

Unfortunately, most suburban homes are little more than plywood and sheetrock, although some are a bit more fortified such as concrete or brick homes. Regardless, most home exteriors will not stop even a small caliber handgun bullet. That is not good! You can do better.

If you expect to need fortified return-fire positions (such as next to windows) then you need to do something about your walls. Ideas such as sandbags filled with sand, dirt, or rocks will work, but understand the amount of work needed to fill and stack them. Also recognize that sandbags are not going to be 100% effective in all situations but are certainly a worthy investment if you can purchase them now.

Another idea would be to pre-purchase a few dozen bags of gravel (or sand) from your local hardware store. These can be stacked up a dozen high (baled together for structural integrity) and placed next to the window from which you can take cover. I've even seen a guy take this idea further and suggest filling the insides of your drywall next to the window with gravel as a more permanent idea.

Soft ideas to delay intruders

Smart criminals should expect that any home worth looting is fairly well hardened using some of the above ideas. As such, they may not be surprised… just deterred. I would suggest you include a few additional obstacles should they gain entry.

Considering that the threats you will face inside your home are going to be people on foot, then focus on their vulnerabilities. In particular, I would bet that if a hardened element (your door or window) has been successfully breached then their natural action would be to storm the breached spot fast and hard. Here are a few "soft" ideas to slow them down and maybe even disorient them:

- **Mass** – Move furniture in front of doors and ground floor windows to make it difficult for intruders to enter quickly.
- **Bungee cords** – Use several bungee cords stretched across the width of a door. Bungee cords have a lot of give and take. If a door is still attached to its hinges then these may provide an additional barrier to entry (as well as an awkward obstacle) to get around.
- **Fish netting** – Netting can also be used to similar effect as bungee cords. If stretched loosely over a door opening and attached securely enough to the wall studs around the door then, even if the door is breached, a person could become quickly entangled.
- **Plastic sheeting** –Thick plastic sheeting draped over a doorway might also be used like bungee cords and fish netting as well (but is more easily bypassed) so I would suspect that this idea is more disorienting, especially if black plastic sheeting is used. You would be able to see the plastic sheet moving but the intruders wouldn't be able to see anything initially.
- **Lubricant on floors** – Utilize motor oil or something similar to grease the areas in front of doors and windows if they are tiled or hardwood. This idea won't work so well with carpeted floors but you can either remove the carpet or improvise and place a sheet of plywood down or even just thick plastic sheeting with a lot of oil and (hopefully) get a similar effect.

Early Warning Systems

When it comes to defending you and yours, the more warning you have the better. There many types of early warning devices, both high- and low-tech, from electronic surveillance to trip wires. What you can and should use will depend on the layout of your home and the perimeter surrounding it. For example, do you have a fence and lots of trees to install sensors, cameras, and trip wires, or is your yard barren?

Even if you don't have much to work with you can still install such early warning systems but you'll have to be a bit more creative with them because they may be far more obvious to intruders.

Gadgets to warn you

So, what can and should you use? If you like electronic gadgets, the Dakota Alert MURS system is a great option. This system is wireless and transmit signals for miles so this should work well for most suburban situations. For 360 degree protection you're going to need additional wireless transmitters. Mount them a few feet off the ground to avoid small animals from tripping them and you'll get the drop on the bad guys for sure.

An assuredly lower-tech option is the tried-and-true trip wire device. Simply tie a sturdy strand of clear fishing line (say 80 lb test) between two trees and attach a small can or two of rocks between them. If somebody (or something) runs into the fishing line then the rocks inside the cans will rattle around. You can improve on this device substantially by substituting actual trip wire that can be purchased at local army surplus stores in place of the fishing line; in addition, you can substitute

an audible alarm or even something like a cowbell in place of the can of rocks that you could rig to go off instead. Another variation is the beer can alarm.

Consider utilizing both low and high tech ideas. Use the Dakota Alert MURS system along your outside perimeter for the greatest warning and have an assortment of lower-tech warning systems closer to your home should your outer perimeter warning system fail, especially near windows and doors.

Understand that there are endless alternative early warning devices—a Google search will confirm that—limited only by your imagination and ingenuity. Just be aware that some ideas can be dangerous to make and even illegal to use.

Dogs revisited

As previously stated in the home security segment, dogs can be a huge asset with regards to early warnings and even home defense. I would strongly encourage you to include them in your home defense plans, if you're so inclined.

In particular, large, loyal, and fierce dogs are best. Breeds such as German Shepherds, Rottweilers, Airedales, Pit Bulls, Great Danes, Terriers, and Dobermans are obvious choices; there are many alternative breeds that may prove useful too. I would consider at least two of these dogs because dogs naturally work in packs.

Generally, small dogs are not what you want… sorry Pomeranians and miniature Poodles, with the exception that some small dogs tend to make wonderful early warning systems. Whatever dog you choose, training is highly recommended.

People power

Perhaps the most important aspect of your early warning system is the effective use of people power. Take a page from the Army's book and post at least one lookout at all times, although two would be better if manpower permits.

This lookout is responsible for 360 degree observation of the perimeter. Give them binoculars and a whistle and expect them to patrol the area at all times. They should probably be armed too. In order to avoid fatigue, limit shifts to no more than eight hours depending on how many adults you have available for duty. And make it understood that every able-bodied person gets to participate on an ever-rotating schedule (both day and night).

A set of signals should be used to alert your family as well. For example, use one whistle to indicate a "be aware" posture, while two whistles might indicate "trouble is coming, be ready now". Prepare a pre-determined response to threats too. Who goes where? Who covers what spots? What immediate actions should be taken to better fortify your home? And so on.

To improve on this concept, consider using GMRS two-way radios in addition to (or instead of a whistle) for greater communication options and increased OPSEC. Note that the GMRS radios should not use any special proprietary batteries that cannot be recharged using normal battery recharging options. You could do other things to improve your situation as well, such as to require your lookout to check in every five minutes or even go so far as to construct a designated observation post (OP) and related listening post (LP). Perhaps a sniper's nest is appropriate. For those with military experience, I'm sure a host of ideas will pop up.

While people will be busy doing plenty of other things, please don't neglect proper observation of your perimeter by actual people. All of the gadgets you might erect can't match the senses and decision-making of a person on the lookout for trouble.

Plans of Action and Communications

You MUST have a well-thought-out plan of action as to how your property will be defended from intruders. That is, who goes where, who covers what, what happens if a section of the home is breached, how is that communicated, and so on. Your family should have a distress signal to alert others that a threat is near. Even hand signals could be useful in the right circumstances. The point is to figure out what you and your family will do… now.

You should also clearly communicate to your adversaries too. Something as simple as spray painting the message "keep out, looters will be shot!" on your garage door tends to make all but the most determined of individuals have second thoughts about stepping foot on your property. Post a variety of signs to deter adversaries.

Weapons and Force-Multipliers (Lethal and Non-Lethal Options)

You simply cannot expect to defend your family and home at all if you do not have the ability to respond to a show of force no matter how well hardened you think your home is. Given enough time the bad guys will breach your defenses.

Lethal weapons

Firearms are usually the first thing people think of when it comes to home defense, and for good reason. The expectation is that the intruders are not there to make

friends or kindly take your supplies and leave. The bad guys mean business… you had better mean business too!

I'm not an ex-military commando. Nor do I drool over the latest Guns & Ammo magazine. If you want to know what shotgun or handgun to buy, there are about a million websites and other sources for that information. Do a Google search for "home defense" and most results will be firearm-related.

If you must have AN answer, though, the best option is probably a simple pump-action shotgun. The Remington 870 or Mossberg 500—chambered for 12 gauge rounds—are usually the most recommended choices because they are reliable, consistent, relatively inexpensive, etc. A reliable handgun for each capable adult (with appropriate stopping power) is strongly encouraged as well.

Regardless of your current opinion on firearms, in a situation where the bad guys truly want your belongings (or worse), you really MUST have lethal defense capabilities. You MUST have enough weapons and ammunition to properly arm all capable adults. Everyone MUST be trained to use firearms properly, safely, accurately, competently, and so on. Oh, and you MUST obey your local, state, and federal laws regarding firearm purchases, ownership, and use. Arming yourself legally and responsibly is the right thing to do.

FYI, knives are also considered a lethal defense but should not be considered a viable alternative to any firearm. I'm sure you're heard the saying "never bring a knife to a gun fight"? That said, there are reasons to own equipment such as combat knives such as due to excessive legal restrictions on firearms or even as a

last-ditch self-defense option. Knives have a place in self-defense but NOT in place of a sufficient firearm.

Non-lethal options

There are plenty of other possibilities besides firearms and knives. Tasers, collapsible batons, stun guns, pepper spray, and baseball bats are a few of the principal choices. In my opinion, these options are not at all indicated in a post-disaster, SHTF situation. They're ok to have in everyday life but firearms are where it's at in any life-threatening situation. Whatever you choose to include in your arsenal, have a good understanding of how to use your chosen device. For instance, can you operate it in the dark and with either hand? Using it should be second nature, just as using a firearm should be.

Force-multipliers

A force-multiplier is something that increases your effectiveness in combat. Night-vision goggles would be such an example. Handheld communication devices would be another example. Even a simple strobe flashlight might qualify if you can use it to disorient an assailant. Here are a few others combat-related force-multipliers (in no particular order, expect the first one):

- **Training** – this is probably the most important force-multiplier possible. There's a very good reason why SWAT teams train so often. You should mimic such training routines as much as feasible. That's not to say that you need to be clearing your home on a regular basis with your kids in tow. More likely, training should refer to how you and your family will react to a variety of situations, from unexpected loud noises to breached exteriors to a fire in the house. Talk about and practice what you will do.

- **Cover of darkness** – Remember that you know the layout of your home, its surroundings, the neighborhood, and so on. Use this to your advantage. The more you can accomplish in the darkness the better.
- **Binoculars** – Use binoculars to see the bad guys before they see you!
- **Scoped rifles** (including starlight scopes) – Anyone who hunts knows the value of a rifle scope. Starlight scopes, in particular, magnify ambient light sources (such as moonlight) to allow you to see via the scope in the dark.
- **High capacity magazines** – Some firearm platforms allow for magazines that accept more rounds, which can be highly beneficial in a gun fight.
- **Camouflage** – There's a reasons why the armed forces utilize camouflage… because it works!
- **Tactical vests** – Such tactical vests allow you to carry a lot of gear on your person (e.g., handgun, extra magazines, flashlight, etc) while keeping your hands free to do other things.
- **Smoke grenades and tear gas grenades** – Use smoke grenades to disorient your assailants thus providing a brief tactical advantage.
- **Body armor vest** – The obvious benefits of body armor need not be stated. Please understand that there are different levels of protection available so you should do some research before purchasing a vest. If you do purchase such armor then consider the matching helmet too!
- **Flares** – Automotive flares can be used to mark positions to allies, distract the bad guys, light stuff on fire, and even blind assailants who may be using night vision goggles against you.
- **Long range weapons** – If you can "reach out and touch them" before they can touch you, then that's a good thing. Just be careful with such thoughts because you may be considered the aggressor in a court of law if you choose to make the first move.

- **Guerilla tactics** – There are whole manuals dedicated to such tactics. Fight dirty if you have to… you can be certain the bad guys will.

Specific Vulnerabilities (Fire, Ballistics, Escape Routes, etc)

One of the primary vulnerabilities most suburban homes is that of fire. I suspect that if you have done a good job of hardening and defending your home, you may find that the bad guys will just choose to burn your house down; after all, if they can't have your stuff then neither should you. And, with incendiary devices such as Molotov cocktails being easy to make, you must have some ability to deal with fires that were deliberately created by your assailants. It's just a sad fact.

So, what can you do? If you had the money and foresight then you can do all sorts of things like installing a metal roof and utilizing fire resistant foam to seal gaps between floors, but that's not what this book is about. You might also read FEMA suggestions for wildfire prevention for general fire resistance.

Money and FEMA aside, here are a few ideas of what you can do if and when the time comes:

- **Board up ALL your windows** with the ¾" OSB plywood discussed earlier. That way the bad guys must break through the plywood before being able to toss anything in.
- **Remove any dead vegetation** around the outside perimeter of your home as it may easily catch fire; and, if they can't readily start a fire inside then they may choose to start one outside instead.
- **Remove as many highly flammable items as possible** away from windows and doors such as drapes, loose clothing, blankets, furniture, and even carpeting if you're so inclined.

- **Place fire extinguishers in every room** and make them readily accessible. They won't be of much help in completely eliminating fire caused by something like a Molotov cocktail but they may be able to contain it for long enough to do something else.
- **Connect a garden hose to your spigot in preparation to fight a fire** (this only works if there is still water pressure) but a garden hose is a much better at extinguishing a fire than are fire extinguishers alone.
- **Gather several buckets of sand or dirt** and place them alongside the fire extinguishers. Sand and dirt can be used to smother a fire.
- **Ensure everyone knows how and where to evacuate** if a fire gets out of hand. Additionally, all family members should have egress masks available and know how to use them.

Know How and When to Abandon Your Home

As difficult as it may be to believe, you may find the need to abandon what you so dearly defend. Instead of this being a highly chaotic and unplanned event, do your best to put some order to the process with a plan of action that everyone can follow. I know I'm oversimplifying this situation—I can only imagine the stress and hectic nature of such a decision as well as the circumstances surrounding it—but I firmly believe it is better to have an idea of what you can and will do before you actually need to do it. Also, rather than me telling you what you should do in this case, I will offer several steps and questions you should ponder instead.

The first step is to accept the fact that you may need to abandon your home. The next step is to decide under what circumstances this will happen. That is, at what point do you and your family decide you must evacuate? Should you only evacuate if your home is about to be breached? What happens if your chosen evacuation exit

is the spot being breached? Should some family members evacuate early (such as the children) just in case they would be unable to do so later?

You will also need to decide where you will go. Do you have a meet-up location where all family members are expected to rally immediately after evacuating? Can everyone navigate to that location on foot, at night, and maybe even wounded? How long will you wait for others? What happens if not everyone shows up?

Do you have an evacuation spot picked out (either a wilderness retreat or an actual shelter) in advance? Do you have equipment and supplies stationed there? How long can these supplies last? Are you going to stay there permanently or move on?

Last, are there any plans to retake your home or is the risk too great? Will you surveil your home and wait for the bad guys to move on or is it a complete loss?

Caching supplies

If you do find the need to abandon your home then you're going to need some equipment (guns), supplies (clothing), and food you can rely upon. Certainly this list can grow very quickly. If you're unaware of the term, a cache is a hidden stash of items that you can rely upon if need be.

A cache can be anything from digging out the side of a hill to burying supplies in a sealed PVC pipe. Whatever you choose to do, I highly recommend you have a few caches in nearby locations but far enough away from your home that you won't be noticed retrieving your supplies.

Assuming you already have a retreat location picked out then it is incumbent upon you to stash a majority of your cached supplies there. I would also encourage you to have at least one smaller cache with a few basic supplies somewhere along the way to your primary retreat, especially if it is a significant distance away.

It's SHTF and There's NO Going Back

If it really appears that things are going to be bad for quite some time, then you may need to take some drastic actions to deny criminals. It seems that there are two different schools of thought as to how to approach this situation: one school says you should be as inconspicuous as possible, while the other school says you should flaunt your defensibility and numbers. I'm still not entire sure how I feel about it, but I would suspect that I would employ a bit of both schools if and when the time comes. Do what feels right to you.

A note on booby traps

As much as booby traps may sound like a good idea, I would strongly discourage their use for two reasons (1) booby traps and highly illegal in the eyes of the law and (2) booby traps are accidents waiting to happen.

The first concern, that booby traps are illegal, refers to the fact that their use can still turn into a major legal problem—even in emergency situations—in all but the most dire, end-of-the-world scenarios. If society returns to some normalcy then you could find yourself liable in criminal or civil court for your actions. Why? Because booby traps are intended to maim or kill their victims, they are considered offensive; it's the same as if you willfully shot to kill someone without them necessarily being a threat to your life. Just because somebody is snooping around your house doesn't mean they're up to no good… at least in the eyes of the law.

The second concern, that booby traps are accidents waiting to happen, relates to the fact that you never know who might be walking about where you have booby traps active. Heck, it could be your own kids, unaware neighbors, and even you if you forgot where they are. Because booby traps are usually hidden from obvious detection they are more likely an inherent danger to you and your family than the bad guys. Keep this fact in mind.

Ideas to deter access

Following are a few other ideas you can use prior to SHTF to improve your perimeter's defensibility:

- **Install a fence around your perimeter**. Not only are they a psychological barrier but they can be used to funnel intrudes to certain areas (such as a gate opening or driveway).
- **Install a metal gate across your driveway** that can be closed and locked. Sadly, such a gate may look highly out of place in suburbia but may be accepted in more rural areas.
- **Plant rose bushes, blackberries, or other thorny bushes** that don't look out of place along the fence line to discourage people from simply jumping the fence.
- **Install heavy-duty planter boxes** along the front of your home to combat vehicles being used to ram your home's exterior walls.

Following are a several additional ideas you can use after SHTF to make your defensive perimeter more difficult to break through:

- **Block roadways, driveways, and even fence lines with abandoned vehicles**. While this strategy will reduce vehicular threats, it could backfire by giving the bad guys usable cover from which to assault your home.
- **String steel cables along the fence line** to catch and repel vehicles trying to ram your fence. These should be ½” to ¾”" steel cables strung about 2 and 3 feet above the ground.
- **Install trenches dug at least 18” deep, 24” wide** (at minimum) and extend at least a few feet from the walls (instead of planter boxes) along the exterior of your home to stop vehicles from being used to ram the walls. If you do this early enough you can allow the natural grass and weeds to grow in and around the trenches to disguise their presence. The dug up dirt could then be used to create defensive berms (or fill sandbags) elsewhere.
- **Bury a few dozen well-placed 4x4 fence posts** to act as a bollard style barriers (aka, a British Home Guard “hedgehog” barrier) to slow down oncoming vehicles. These must be buried deep so it would be quite labor intensive. String steel cable between them to improve their effective reach. You can even get a bit more devious and drive a few dozen long nails through each post pointing in different directions such that if it were bulled over the nails could pop a tire or two. If you wanted a ready-to-implement solution, you could dig and bury PVC pipe where you want these posts to go and simply drop them into place if/when they are needed. To prevent them from being easily removed you can devise a basic chain and lock/bolt system to secure the posts from being removed with little more effort.
- **Use rebar instead of fence posts** to similar effect. Purchase a few dozen 4 foot lengths of ½” rebar and use a fence post driver to install them at severe angles (pointed outward from your house) sticking about 12-18” above the ground. Get devious and place a point on the end and you have a real

vehicular obstruction going. An alternative to rebar could be tree branches or even deck railing posts, if need be; definitely sharpen them well.

- **Set dozens of concrete blocks out in your yard** to slow down vehicles too. In addition to trying to completely stop a vehicle you could slow it down as well. Scatter them throughout the yard for best effect.
- You could also **install concertina wire** (aka, "razor wire") along the top of your fence line. You're definitely going to need the proper personal protective equipment to work with this stuff, including protective gloves made to work with razor wire, a face shield, and forearm protection.
- **Anti-personnel trips wires** (aka, "tanglefoot wire") stung at various heights throughout your perimeter are useful for slowing down intruders on foot.
- **Fallen trees can be used in similar fashion to abandoned vehicles** to block roadways and driveways as though they were an "abatis". Keep the branches in tact and add some other entanglements for greater effect.
- **Make you house look as if it's already been looted** (as well as the surrounding houses if they have been abandoned). Scatter some of your belongings on the lawns. Place broken furniture and such outside as well. Break an obvious window pane or two. Even go so far as to make the ground-floor level look ransacked. Anything to make your home look not worth any effort is useful.

Certainly, many of the above suggestions are geared toward stopping vehicular onslaughts. I firmly believe that any group intent on taking what's yours will choose to use the most obvious advantage they believe they have over the basic suburban home: vehicles as rams. This isn't to say that they won't try different tactics but vehicles will likely be a huge concern in such a situation. Prepare!

Conclusion

I hope you've learned a few things that you can honestly use to properly defend your family, home, and possessions. I should reiterate that your home security cannot be improved until you have taken appropriate actions to do so.

Assuming money is a concern, start with a few of the door and window suggestions in the Home Security segment. Remember that you can drastically improve your door security simply by replacing the latch, strike plate, and hinge screws in all of your exterior doors. A simple piece of wood can be used to brace your windows from opening. Keep your bushes and trees well trimmed to reduce hiding spots. Even a few appliance timers connected to lamps don't cost much and may drastically improve your security.

Most important, though, are your actions. Lock your door deadbolts at all times. Keep your garage door and windows closed as often as you can. Don't hide a spare key on your property. Don't open your front door to strangers. Get to know your neighbors. These and other actions make a huge difference to avoid being targeted by would-be thieves and criminals.

As for your home defense, again, there's no need to spend a lot of money here upfront. I do, nonetheless, suggest you pre-purchase a few supplies such as the plywood and screws you would need to cover windows and door glass.

The most important thing you can do—above all else—is to discuss what you can do to prepare for such events with your family and enact appropriate plans to deal with said events. Get going now as tomorrow may be too late!